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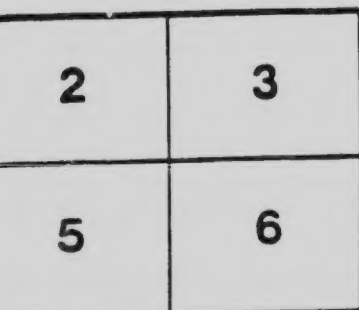
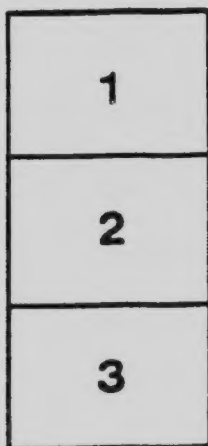
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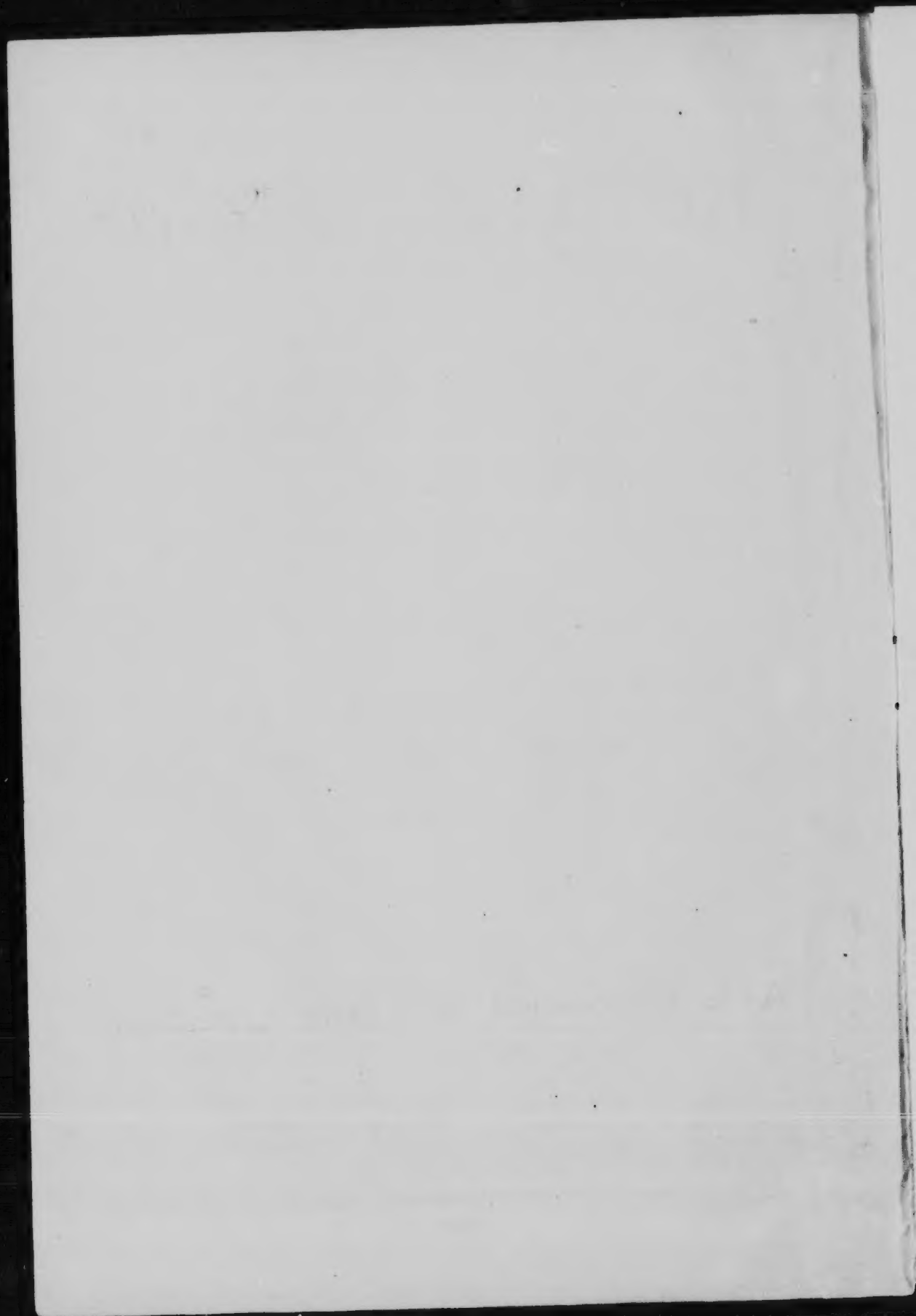
BETTER TERMS

Premier McBride Reviews Negotiations and
Policy of Provincial Government

Ottawa Accepts Proposal for Commission to
Investigate Claims of British
Columbia

Able Exposition of Entire Question

[Speech of the Hon. R. McBride, Premier, in Legislature, reprinted from the News-Advertiser,
February 15th, 1912.]



BETTER TERMS

Premier McBride Reviews Negotiations and Policy of Provincial Government

"Mr. Speaker: In rising to move this resolution upon the question which has come to be generally known as the subject of better terms, I need scarcely preface my remarks by explaining to this House at any length the object which we have in view today, which is to crystalize, as it were, the proceedings which it will be necessary for us in British Columbia to take by reason of the decision of the Federal Government to appoint a commission to adjudicate upon our claim, such as was suggested by this administration some time ago. Perhaps of all the questions that have been discussed over an extended period of time by this Legislature there is none that is more pregnant in possibilities or of more vital importance to the future of this country than is this. I find it impossible, no matter how optimistic one may be, to convey to this House any idea of the results that may accrue to British Columbia when this matter shall have been adjusted in strict fairness to us—what the final and right solution may mean in the working out of the destiny of British Columbia as a very important part of the Dominion.

B. C.'s Attitude Fair and Reasonable.

"As for the position of British Columbia in this matter, I may say in all sincerity that we have never approached this question in any selfish or unfair manner whatsoever, but have consistently and insistently kept to the front always our contention that what was right and in the general interest of British

Columbia must be for the common good of Canada. In all our consideration of this matter of fairer terms, we have sedulously tried to have our friends of the Eastern provinces understand that what we have proposed is not simply and solely the betterment of the financial position of this province, but rather an arrangement based on simple equity that will be of assistance to us in the development of this province of Canada so that it shall become a more important factor in the confederation of provinces, place British Columbia in a better position to contribute substantially to the Federal exchequer and generally advance and strengthen our position as an important part of Canada. In offering this resolution, it will not be necessary for me to say very much—and nothing of an argumentative nature—in commending it to this House. It will be, I am sure, a matter of very great satisfaction to the members of this Legislature and to the people of this province that a question, or rather a series of questions which have agitated their minds for some years have now been placed upon a basis which promises in the near future to be definitely and for all time to come set at rest.

History of the Negotiations.

"The history of the negotiations for better terms and all that may be included under that head, ought to be, and I am sure is, familiar to residents of this province who have lived here for

the space of ten years or more, and I may be pardoned if I refer but briefly to what has occurred in this connection. The first delegation visiting Ottawa in advocacy of British Columbia's case went in 1901, and consisted of the then Premier, Mr. Dunsmuir, and yourself, sir, as Attorney-General of the day. I was privileged to occupy a seat in the Legislature at that time, and recall a great deal of the discussion which resulted in that delegation being sent to the national cabinet. The report of that delegation forms the basis of the claims that have since been consistently pressed on Ottawa. The second delegation was in January of 1902, when the then Premier, Col Prior, and yourself, sir, as Attorney General, presented further the claims of the province, which in this instance laid special stress upon the physical conditions of the province as responsible for the greater cost of administration and a justification of our claims for special treatment. In neither of these cases was there a definite request for a sum of money in settlement and in both cases the matter ended there. In neither case was definite or tangible result attained.

"The third delegation was in 1903, after the present administration came into power, and it consisted of the Hon. Charles Wilson, Attorney-General of that day and the Hon. R. F. Green, Chief Commissioner of Lands and Works. On that occasion, for the first time, a definite and formal request was made for a commission of inquiry such as we may expect presently to have. Up to that time the Government had supplied in its various reports and memoranda a vast amount of statistical and other matter in support of its contentions.

Premier McBride at the Interprovincial Conference.

"The next stage in these negotiations came with the interprovincial conference of October, 1906, the conference which, as First Minister, I was privileged to attend. All the Prime Ministers of Canada were present, and the discussion covered a wide range, extending over three or four days. I took

opportunity early in the proceedings to submit British Columbia's brief, and I had behind me practically the unanimous voice of the country in the stand I then took. The only direct result of that conference of 1906 was the granting to this province of a sum of \$100,000 per annum for ten years, which the provincial ministers, in common with Sir Wilfrid Laurier and his cabinet, considered ample to meet the requirements of the case. Despite the fact that we have never, either, directly or indirectly, agreed to accept this annual grant as settlement of our claim, it marked the first recognition we had received from without the province in the nature of fair and honest recognition of the fact that British Columbia was in equity entitled to better and more adequate recognition than it had received under the Terms of Union and the Confederation compact. We refused, of course, to agree to this grant of \$100,000 per year for ten years being recognized as adequate to a final and unalterable settlement, but when opportunity offered we could point to this small grant as something in the nature of tangible recognition of that fact that we had a claim entitled to be considered. Following the conference of Prime Ministers in 1906, the Federal Parliament submitted a petition to the Imperial Parliament which covered what I might call the new matter herein, at any rate in so far as the fiscal arrangements of the several provinces were concerned. This petition was in due course submitted to the Colonial Secretary, with a view to the Colonial Secretary bringing it before the Imperial House, and having that House incorporate it into the Imperial Statutes as an amendment to the law which brought about the Confederation of the Canadian provinces in 1867. Following this I took the ground that nothing should be left undone to have our case understood by the highest form of the country.

"The Legislature coincided in my view, and in pursuance of a resolution passed by this House on March 21, 1907, I visited London to protest against the attempt to have the B. N. A. Act amendment made a settlement "final and unalterable." After a stay in London covering several weeks, I succeeded in

securing an amendment of the Imperial Act which left the way open for this province to continue its agitation for better terms, notwithstanding the attitude of the Parliament at Ottawa, which agreed to the payment to this province of the \$100,000 a year for a period of ten years and provided that when the last payment should have been made our case would be regarded as closed, and we should have no further opportunity to advance evidence in support of our case, already admitted to be one worthy of consideration.

What the Words "Final and Unalterable" Meant.

"So determined was the then Finance Minister of the Dominion, Mr. Fielding, and his chief, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, that the doors should be closed against British Columbia securing justice that they even went so far as to incorporate in the act language strange indeed to anyone acquainted with parliamentary procedure. The words set down were "final and unalterable." So far as Ottawa was concerned, there was no desire or intention that we should have opportunity to present our claim, no matter upon how sound a foundation of right and justice it might rest. My own course at London had been closely followed by the Federal authorities. Sir Wilfrid Laurier was himself in London at the time, and took opportunity to present his views to the Imperial Government, and they did not hesitate to insist that this paltry million was to be taken as payment of all claims the province might have against the Dominion of Canada.

"For my part, I was insistent that the Parliament at Ottawa had no right to take that stand—that it was not competent for them to say that these questions were settled until we were in agreement. It would not have been conceivable for the authorities at London, in fairness, to have said that we should be put in a position wherein we could not follow up the argument which during so many years we had been steadily and consistently putting forward. The compact of Confederation was practically a treaty, and when it was proposed to make any alteration, it must be

with the consent of the high contracting parties.

"Mr. Winston Churchill was then Under Secretary of State for the Colonies, and he laid down the rule that it was not permissible for the authorities at Ottawa to practically dictate the business of the several provinces or frame up an arrangement that was not in accord with the views of the interested provinces. The action of the Imperial Government was to leave the way open for the province to still further press its legitimate claims, and this Legislature, on the 7th March, 1906, reaffirmed its position.

Recent Negotiations at Ottawa.

The recent mission to Ottawa, of which the report is now before the House, is a complete vindication of the position consistently maintained by this province, we having been granted what we so long have asked for—a commission empowered to examine fully into the claims of British Columbia. The various debates on the subject which have taken place in this Legislature, and the entire history of these negotiations, will bear me out when I say again today, as I have said time and again in sessions gone by, that this Provincial Government has always been desirous of approaching this question in a non-political way. We have never sought to make party or political capital out of it, but merely to press home at Ottawa with all fairness and as strongly as possible what we regard as our legitimate rights. Nothing was done by us to embarrass Sir Wilfrid Laurier or his Government until he and they refused to meet us in the fair way in which we were entitled to be met. If we had attempted to make this a party question our course would immediately have been challenged, and we should have lost ground immeasurably. But until we were treated in the manner the Dominion Government proposed to treat us in 1907, there was no politics in our presentation of this question—we were merely striving to get for British Columbia what we contended she was rightfully entitled to. When Sir Wilfrid took the stand that he did, he left us no

other course than to make it a political question and see how far we could press home on the hustings the righteousness of our case.

Mr. Borden's Promise Fulfilled.

"In the various stages of negotiation in submitting our data to Ottawa, we took care to fully advise each member of the cabinet and to supply him and each member of the House of Commons as well, with printed copies of each and every document, so that all might know precisely what was being done and the ground we stood on. No doubt this was instrumental in the first instance in stimulating the great interest subsequently taken in the better terms question by the Conservative leader, Mr. Borden, who early in the proceedings said in a telegram to Sir Hibbert Tupper, who was then taking an active part in the campaign: "Let me also say that I have given much thought to the conditions in British Columbia, which in your opinion call for special attention in considering the special financial relations between the Dominion and that province. You claim not only that these conditions are exceptional and peculiar to the situation and physical character of your province, but also that they are permanent in their nature. In my opinion they are such as to demand immediate inquiry and investigation, to the end that any injustice clearly established may be immediately relieved."

"That was Mr. Borden's attitude toward this question before it was forced into the political zone. It goes to show how he had then interested himself in it, and how he was prepared to take the very course that we urged in fairness, and of which we are now assured. Later on, when visiting the West, we have Mr. Borden, in the Opera House here in November, 1907, saying: 'I give a pledge to the people of this province in the general election of 1904. I did not make that pledge without due advisement and due consideration, because the claim of the province of British Columbia had been set forth to me by some of my Conservative friends of this province in elaborate papers and documents—not only official papers and documents, but other statistics collected at enormous

pains and enormous industry, from which I satisfied myself that there were good grounds to believe that permanent conditions exist in the province of British Columbia which call for special inquiry and special treatment. And so I pledged myself by a letter or telegram which I sent to my friend Sir Hibbert Tupper, that if the Conservative party were returned to power I would be prepared to grant and I would grant to the people of this province an inquiry upon the lines suggested; and further than that, I would be prepared—the Conservative Government would be prepared—to carry out the recommendations of the gentlemen of the commission appointed to make the inquiry.'

A Stupid Local Opposition.

Is there anything to which the other provinces of Canada would object to or ought to object to at all in the holding of a fair inquiry respecting an alleged permanent condition? From this the House can see and the public can see, Hon. Mr. McBride continued, despite anything that the Opposition may say in its criticism, that this Government has been quite sincere in its advocacy of better terms for British Columbia; that it has no desire to make this a party question; that it has tried constantly to keep this question on a higher plane. It seems too bad that even now, after Mr. Borden has implemented the promise that he gave when in Opposition and signified his intention of appointing a commission such as we have so long sought, to note the attitude that the Liberal press of this province, or at least a part of that press, sees fit to adopt. As an instance in point of the attitude of the political elements opposed to us we have the "Times" newspaper as recently as on Monday last, almost at the very moment that our return was presented to this House, advising the Premier of Manitoba in the matter of the Manitoba boundary, which just now happens to be a somewhat acute question with that sister province, to follow the example of McBride and 'put it up to Ottawa' and then forget it.

"I will read what the "Times" says: 'Perhaps we have no right to advise Premier Roblin of Manitoba, but if we

had we should say, "Premier, do with your troubles at Ottawa just as Honorable Richard McBride did with his political buffoonery on the question of better terms for British Columbia; forget it! Take what Tory Ontario says is your share of the spoils and be content. What is the use of raising difficulties now that your own party is in power? Stick together and forget your differences. McBride knows when to drop a campaign issue. Learn from him."

"As a matter of fact," the First Minister continued, "The Victoria 'Times' has never yet got acquainted with me. It probably never will. And to tell the truth I am quite satisfied that the estrangement should continue. That is a good sample bray from that sanctum. If they had taken the trouble to find out they might very easily have learned that I had never abandoned my fight for better terms, and they would not have been likely to have said 'forget it, as McBride has forgotten better terms.'

Commission to Be Appointed at Once.

"Now, Mr. Speaker, we brought down a few days ago a return to this House which is in itself a distinct assurance that Mr. Borden, now that he is in power, is prepared to implement the pledge that he gave while in Opposition and appoint the commission that we have sought during all the course of this better terms agitation. Within the next few weeks we shall see the work of that commission under way. But what does the 'Times' say? I know that those who are acquainted with that paper have come to look upon the 'Times' somewhat as a joke, but perhaps I may again refer to it if merely to lighten with a little humorous touch the somewhat serious question that we have under consideration. After the papers had been presented to this House—after his confidence in my abandonment of the fight I had been carrying on so long had been so rudely shattered by reading the report of the proceedings of this Legislature, he tells his readers that 'the outcome of Mr. McBride's nine years of strenuous work has shown Mr. McBride to be an inconsequential trifler, a poseur, an unmitigated pretender, and—so far as the matters referred to in his return brought down yesterday—an unscrupulous deceiver.' (Laughter).

It is unnecessary perhaps to say more. Those who are behind this Victoria comic illustrated publication possibly understand what their patrons want. I merely mention this matter as an example of how an ex-minister of the Dominion is inclined to treat a matter of so vital interest to the people and the future of British Columbia. It is perhaps this attitude of my friend Mr. Templeman and the 'Times,' and the policy they have jointly pursued, that have had the effect of effacing the solid seven that at one time represented British Columbia in the Canadian Commons and presents in this House the spectacle of a great political party represented by a single lonely member. (Laughter and applause.)

"Mr. Borden in 1904 gave his promise, after fully acquainting himself with the merits of British Columbia's claim, that if his party were returned to power these claims would be investigated upon their merits. During his visit to this province in 1907 he repeated on the public platform and amplified that promise. And he is now loyally carrying out those pledges. When Mr. Borden and his party were returned, we in British Columbia expected with fullest confidence that this would be the case. We were satisfied that if he were elected and installed in office he would issue a commission as desired—that he would make good his word. And now, although he has as yet been only a few months in control of the affairs of Canada, he is doing so, and shortly an investigation will be under way and we shall have right and opportunity to present the case which we have so long desired to get before such a tribunal.

Nothing to Be Left Undone.

"Let me assure this House that this government will leave nothing undone in order that the case of British Columbia may be submitted as completely and as effectively as possible. In this connection we are prepared to institute exhaustive inquiries so that all statistics bearing up on this matter may be brought up to date and no circumstance overlooked that will be likely to operate to the advantage of the province in the consideration of its claim before the proposed commission. It is to be hoped

that the scope of the commission will be made sufficiently wide as to embrace the many other open questions that have arisen or may arise as between the Dominion and the province, and which may in all fairness and justice be adjusted in such a forum. There may be such other questions, some of them of a constitutional character, which properly may be presented to this commission. If the Government of British Columbia is able to secure a settlement of such questions without delay in this manner it will be justified in going to considerable length in doing so. It is but fair to conclude that in this general question of better terms, when it comes to be inquired into, may be incorporated all those matters in dispute between the two Governments or have been the subject of treaty, and that steps will be taken at a very early date for the work of the commission to commence. I shall not attempt to anticipate the results. We have, I believe, a strong and just case, and the best efforts of this Government will be put forth to obtain a verdict based on equity for the province. I have much pleasure in moving, seconded by my friend, the Attorney-General:

"Whereas by a resolution passed on March 7, 1908, this House declared that the grant of \$100,000 annually for ten years, provided by the 'British North America Act, 1907,' to be paid to this province, is inadequate as a settlement of the claims of British Columbia for special treatment at the hands of Canada; and

"Whereas this House affirmed in said resolution its right to further urge on the Dominion Government that steps be taken to bring about a fair and adequate settlement of the recognized claim of this province; and

"Whereas it appears from the report of Hon. R. McBride, Hon. W. J. Bowser and Hon. W. Foss, a delegation from the Government of British Columbia to Ottawa in November, 1911, that, in response to their representations, the Dominion Government is prepared to appoint a commission, as requested in a memorandum submitted to the Dominion Government by the Hon. R. McBride on October 9, 1906, to investigate the merits of the claim made by this province; such commission to be composed of three persons of eminent repute, one commissioner to be named by the Dominion, one by the Province and the third by agreement of the two commissioners or, failing such agreement, by the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

"Therefore, be it resolved, that this House endorses the course taken by said delegation, and is of the opinion that such commission be appointed at an early date; and that an humble address be presented to His Honor the Lieutenant-Governor requesting that a copy of this resolution be forwarded to the Hon. the Secretary of State at Ottawa."

The resolution passed without a dissenting vote.

